

FRENCH INDOCHINA

attitude towards the natives. The Annamites are very sensitive to injustice and will not be put off with indulgence or pity—which they find equally insulting. The whole relationship is dominated by the enforced proximity of conquered with conqueror.

Brutality characterized far more the early days of colonization than the post-war period, yet it is only within the last ten years that French writers have begun to publicize the fact. During the pacification the treatment of French prisoners by both Annamites and Chinese was anything but gentle, and their cruelty engendered reciprocal brutality. A rebirth of this violence recurred with the industrialization of the colony, when the usual capital-labour straggle was aggravated by the race problem. Leon Werth is the historian of abuse on the French side, especially in the master-servant relationship, and his book makes sorry reading. He records the anger of Annamites at the presumption of the Occidental barbarians in mistreating a people more civilized than themselves. Unfortunately it is the petty official—la mmtalte sous-off^ of which there are legion—who casts terror wherever he goes. At word of his coming whole villages are deserted. He is regarded as a carnivorous and alcoholic brute, and his servants inspire even greater fear and hatred. He either does not thank the Notables at all for their gifts, or ia such a way that it diminishes their prestige. All breathe a sigh of relief when he has passed on to make the life of another village miserable, by threats of fines and imprisonment. But in condemning, and rightly, the brutality of the white race towards men who have no recourse against their caprice, one must not forget that the example was first given by the Annamites themselves. The most ardent native nationalist cannot but admit

that the worst
exploiter of the Annamite is his own countrymen. This is
true through-
out the whole economic scale, from the rich landowner
who evicts the
poor farmer to the plantation foreman who physically
and morally
abuses the men under him, and the jailers even
use torture to elicit
money. No Westerner could equal the atrocious
cruelty that charac-
terized the Cochinese uprising. Those Annamites who
resent so bitterly
the domination with which they are treated by the French,
forget their own
history. They wiped out the Chams and were in the
process of cruelly
the Khmers and Laotians at the time of the conquest.
They treat these nations, as they do the Hindus and
Africans, as
inferior peoples. They have been the ruthless
exploiters of primitive
tribes like the Montagnards. This trait is the Annamite character
as well as their
of submission at any price, makes their denunciation of
French,